

# PLURALISM:

## Discourses, Schisms, Criticism, and Influences

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### Abstrak :

*Indonesia, nampaknya, mau terus mengambil jalan Amerika dalam pengelolaan kenegaraannya. Salah satu kesamaan filsafat Indonesia dan Amerika adalah pluralisme, yang tergambar dalam adagium kedua negara besar tersebut, yaitu : Bhinneka Tunggal Ika dan E Pluribus Unum. Di sinilah pentingnya pembahasan mengenai pluralisme baik wacana awalnya, perbedaan persepsinya, kritik mengenainya, dan pengaruhnya ke dalam tatanan kehidupan sosial politik modern. Tulisan ini terutama membahas tentang pluralisme dalam wacana sosial politik yang merupakan awal mula diskursus pluralisme. Berbagai wacana publik mengenai pluralisme mau tidak mau harus berhubungan dengan pluralisme dalam wacana sosial politik tersebut sebagai pijakan awal mengapa pluralisme menjadi penting dalam tatanan kehidupan modern.*

### Introduction

In origin, societies were relatively homogenous racially, ethnically and religiously.<sup>2</sup> In its development, however, societies become plural or pluralistic.<sup>3</sup> By the time humans became colonizers to other humans there is pluralism. An experience of a colonial economist could be mentioned as follows:

*In Burma, as in Java, probably the first thing that strikes the visitor is the medley of peoples—European, Chinese, Indian, and native. It is in the strictest sense a medley, for the mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language,*

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Yousif, "Islam, Minorities and Religious Freedom: A Challenge to Modern Theory of Pluralism", Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2000, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> I intend not to differentiate the words "plural" and "pluralistic" in the whole writing. For Smith, however, "plural" refers to equilibrium model of society and "pluralistic" passes on conflict model of society. See M. G. Smith, The Plural Society in the British West Indies, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965. passim.

*its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling.*<sup>4</sup>

There is also pluralism by migration. There were Jewish and Christian communities in Nejd during the time of the emerging Muslim community in Arabian Peninsula.<sup>5</sup> And there is also pluralism by slavery: there were Ethiopian blacks during the Prophet Muhammad Era.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of fact, throughout history the Islamic empires faced pluralism. And for this pluralism they were able to govern with relative security a multitude of peoples of varying racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.<sup>7</sup>

In short, until early modern times, pluralism is born by colonial or by migration or by slavery. In modern times, however, plural society is unavoidable. There is pluralism in every society.<sup>8</sup> Recently pluralism becomes more pluralistic than that of before. It is signed not only by religious, ethnic, culture, and language diversities, but it is signed also by different class, status, or different occupation, etc.<sup>9</sup>

Theoretically, then, societies are pluralistic insofar as they exhibit, to a greater or lesser degree, two basic features. (1) Its segmentation into corporate groups that frequently, though not necessarily have different cultures or subcultures; and (2) a social structure compartmentalized into analogous, parallel, noncomplementary but distinguishable sets of institutions.<sup>10</sup> Among the sets of institutions the basic institutional system embraces kinship, education, religion, property and economy, recreation, and certain solidities.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Furnivall in M. G. Smith, *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Palestinian migrants following the ruined Jerusalem destructed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC probably formed these communities. J.J. Saunders, *The History of Medieval Islam*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Spencer-Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, London: Longman, 1979, p. 249.

<sup>7</sup> Yvonne Y. Haddad, *Islamists and the Challenge of Pluralism*, Occasional Papers, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies and Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, 1995, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Mazru'i, "Pluralism and National Integration," in Kuper and Smith (eds.), *Pluralism in Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p. 347.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *ibid.*, p. 82; Nurit Kliot and Stanley Waterman (eds.), *Pluralism and Political Geography: People, Territory and State*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983, p. 315.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre L. van den Berghe, "Pluralism and the Polity: A Theoretical Exploration," in Kuper and Smith (eds.), *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *The Plural Society*, p. 82.

Geographically, the essence of plural societies, and plural states is a living together, a sharing of a common territory by groups which differs from one another in different ways. Thus, boundaries which separate groups and subdivide territories into discrete units, (like nationalism which creates nations from peoples), be they states, autonomous regions or administrative areas, represent the inability of the peoples in a given region to exist within a plural framework.<sup>12</sup>

Mechanically, plural society is a society with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately within the same political unit or the same system of social relation.<sup>13</sup>

Every society has its own system of social relation. And pluralism is one of the systems, for pluralism is "a complex of relationships between groups in a wider society."<sup>14</sup> An ample detail about the place of relationships in a society could be mentioned as follows:

*A society is a self-sufficient, self-perpetuating, and internally autonomous system of social relations. Such a system distinguishes a population occupying a specific territory; but as a system of social relations, the society is clearly distinct from territory or population. The society is the structure of relations through which the population of members is internally organized as joint occupants of a given area. Changes in population mass or composition, or more obviously in territory, do not themselves directly constitute changes in the social system, although they undoubtedly affect in many ways. It is with differences in the systems of social relations, which constitute societies that the distinctions between pluralism, homogeneity, and heterogeneity are directly concerned.*<sup>15</sup>

During the interaction between societies there is an unavoidable process of cultural pluralism, for every society has its own culture.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Nurit Kliot and Stanley Waterman (eds.), op. cit., p. 313.

<sup>13</sup>Furnivall in Smith, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>14</sup>Ali A. Mazrui, in Kuper, p. 333.

<sup>15</sup>Smith in Kuper and Smith (eds.), *Pluralism in Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, pp. 29-30.

<sup>16</sup>Culture in terms of society stated by Firth: "The terms represent different facts or components in basic human situations. If, for instance, society is taken to mean an organized set of individuals with a given way of life, culture is that way of life. If society is taken to be an aggregate of social relations, culture is the content of those relations. Society emphasizes the human component, the aggregate of people and the relations between them. Culture emphasizes the component of accumulated resources, nonmaterial as well as material, which the people inherit, employ, transmute, add to, and transmit." Smith, *The Plural Society*, p. 78.



Cultural pluralism usually refers to diversities based on racial, religious, linguistic or other ethnic attributes.<sup>17</sup> This cultural pluralism is again historical fact. Furnivall tells us the story of colonialization that tropical colonial societies having brought into contact two contrary principles of social life: a tropical system resting on religion, personal custom, and duties, and a Western system resting on reason, impersonal law, and rights.<sup>18</sup>

Based on a condition of socially pluralistic, culturally pluralistic, mentioned above, so politically it should be pluralistic.<sup>19</sup> Let us see what has been going on to response the plurality by socio-political responses. The point here is that the discourse of pluralism is the discourse of how to make a system of social relation based on the condition of pluralism. Hence, the discourse is mostly discussed in political area, for the first. To discuss in other areas of pluralism, then, one should go to the political discourse on pluralism as an earlier stage.

### **Political Discourse on Pluralism: Equilibrium and Conflict**

In political area, additional characteristics frequently associated with pluralism are the following: (1) relative absence of value consensus; (2) relative presence of cultural heterogeneity; (3) relative presence of conflict between the significant corporate groups; (4) relative autonomy between parts of the social system; (5) relative importance of coercion and economic interdependence as basis of social integration; (6) political domination by one of the corporate groups over the others; and (7) primacy of segmental, utilitarian, non-affective, and functionally specific relationships between corporate groups and total, non-utilitarian, affective, diffuse ties within such groups.<sup>20</sup>

What system should answer those above conditions of pluralism?

Politically, the answers are different: some countries intended to unify the pluralism and some countries intended to remain in the pluralistic condition. The first is based on a Totalitarian (the most outstanding is

<sup>17</sup>Nurit Kliot and Stanley Waterman, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>18</sup>Furnivall in Kuper, "Plural Societies: Perspectives and Problems," in Kuper and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup>Yvonne Y. Haddad describes that pluralism is a flexible term, "used to refer to a variety of contradictory conditions, and a complicated concept that at times refers to cultural differences and at other times to social or political pluralism." Haddad, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup>Van den Berghe in Kuper and Smith (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 68.

Marxian) conception or a conflict model and the latter is based on the Liberal conception or an equilibrium model.<sup>21</sup>

Some contrasts are as follows: a Liberal conception tends to compromise between groups and a Marxian tends to synthesis them. Compromise tends to be a position below the ideal; Marxian synthesis is a step nearer perfection. A compromise combines not what is best, but what is least objectionable to the contestants. A synthesis combines the best elements from each side. From a compromise between conflicting interests bear the will of all and from a synthesis of interests stands the General Will or a collective good. Process of integration in a liberal system is a response to a cumulative experience of conflict resolution and in a Marxian theory is by the mechanism of struggle and contradiction. Marx thinks of conflict resolution in terms of absolute victories but Liberalist thinks of it merely in terms of adjustments. For Marxism, sustained oppression creates class-consciousness among the oppressed but for Liberalism sustained oppression helps to create national consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

According to Kuper, a society in equilibrium model differs from a society in conflict model. The term itself shows a different kind of psychological condition: the first is an optimistic society and the latter describes a pessimistic society.<sup>23</sup> Equilibrium societies are regulated societies characterized by dissensus and cultural pluralism and conflict societies are integrated societies characterized by consensus and cultural homogeneity.<sup>24</sup>

In the equilibrium model, autonomy of institutions and independence of intermediate organizations promote dispersion of power and diversity of interest: the competition between interest groups results in a balanced adjustment. By contrast, in the conflict model, independence of the cultural sections implies dissolution of the society; intersectional conflict

<sup>21</sup>The equilibrium model of pluralism derives from "an idealization of the American experience in which crosscutting loyalties and multiple affiliations moderate demands and effects a form of democratic integration through the fluid interplay of political interests." David R. Smock and Audrey C. Smock, *The Politics of Pluralism, A Comparative Study of Lebanon and Ghana*, New York/Oxford/Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1975, p. 10. Dahl (1980) uses the terms of conflictive pluralism for the first and organizational pluralism for the latter. See Nurit Kliot and Stanley Waterman (eds.), *Pluralism and Political Geography: People, Territory and State*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Mazrui in op. cit., pp. 338-341.

<sup>23</sup>Kuper in *ibid.*, p. 10



threatens the very existence of the society.<sup>25</sup>

In the equilibrium model, integration rests on functional relations between institutions and on common values, or on the competitive and dynamic balance among a plurality of independent groups with limited functions and multiple affiliations of members. In the conflict model, however, the binding mechanism is governmental regulation, and ultimately, force.<sup>26</sup>

In the equilibrium model, the bonds between the plural sections are primary, and the state, as a political entity, expresses this basic social integration. In the conflict model, the state precedes and constitutes society; it is the state that is primary.<sup>27</sup> In short, the first is a bottom-up management and the latter is a top-down management. For the societies themselves, the first tends to bear an increased interdependence of different sections in the society whereas the latter is inclined to an increase of dependence upon the state.<sup>28</sup>

The equilibrium model of pluralism adopts a more inclusive definition of the term and is empirically based on societies that are only moderately pluralistic. The conflict model defines pluralism more narrowly, and seeks empirical anchorage in highly pluralistic colonial or slave societies.<sup>29</sup> The equilibrium model has been relatively democratic but the conflict model has been quite despotic.<sup>30</sup>

The equilibrium model postulates two principal bases of social integration in a pluralistic polity. One consists of the intricate web of multiple affiliations, intersecting lines of group cleavage, and shifting alignments depending on specific issues. The other is a broad measure of consensus about values and about the rules of the political game. Pluralism in conflict model is associated with despotic minority rule and with relative lack of consensus on both values legitimizing the existing polity and norms regulating political behavior. It is held by coercion and the technology of violence.<sup>31</sup>

Hence, both the equilibrium and conflict models of pluralism consider

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Van den Berghe in Kuper, *ibid.*, pp. 72.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

the existence of crosscutting relationships and tie a critical variable. In the equilibrium model they provide the integrative mechanism that holds the society together and in the conflict model the presumed total absence of any shared institutions dooms the society to the imposition of authoritarian controls by a minority.<sup>31</sup>

Although, there are two kinds of political responses to pluralism, finally the one associated by pluralism is the liberal one. Pluralism is not simply a society with plurality. All societies have plurality. What distinguishes pluralism from others is the kind of plurality involved. Edward A. Shils declares that liberalism or liberal democracy is the ideal realization of the principles of pluralism.<sup>32</sup> It is because of liberalism (a system of individualistic democracy) is characterized by an approximate balance among social spheres.<sup>33</sup> It is noteworthy, then, for today, the two terms of "pluralism" and "liberal democracy (or simply liberalism)" is being used interchangeably.<sup>34</sup>

### **Criticism on Pluralism**

How ideal theory of pluralism is, it cannot avoid from the precipitation of its critics. The first thing to note is its tendency to a chaotic civility because of its principle of equality of power. Some theorists of political pluralism find the basis for democratic order and integration in the equality of power between groups, and the consequent mutual restraint.<sup>35</sup> This seems an insufficient basis. Indeed, relative equality may be a source of conflict and a stimulus to sectional domination. Thus David Easton writes that, in view of the indecisive evidence supporting the hypothesis that equality in power generates restraint, "it might be suggested that equality in power leads rather to fear, semi paralysis in the resolution of important intergroup differences and ultimately the appeal to violence to settle an impossible situation"<sup>36</sup> Kornhauser also comments that "there is

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>32</sup>Smock and Smock, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

<sup>33</sup>Kornhauser also finds in pluralism a basis for liberal democracy. Van den Berghe mentions that Pluralism is one of the important conditions making for democracy. Kuper and Smith (eds.), op. cit., p. 8 and 67.

<sup>34</sup>Kuper and Smith (eds.), op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>35</sup>J. Roland Pennock, *Democratic Political Theory*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979, pp. 509-512.

<sup>36</sup>*The Political System* (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 303 as quoted by Kuper, *ibid.*, f. 17.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.



no simple relationship between the extent to which power is equally distributed and the stability of democratic order".<sup>38</sup>

Equality itself, in fact, does not operate. In Liberal tradition, "the stability of plural societies is seen as precarious and threatened by sharp cleavages between different plural sections, whose relations to each other are generally characterized by inequality."<sup>39</sup> Equality between human beings individually and nation-states as a whole is a natural or biological impossibility. The search for the utopia in which all shall be equal is a dream, impossible to achieve.<sup>40</sup> Pluralism, therefore, is not democratic because countervailing does not work. In fact, some groups are very much more powerful than others. Some interests go virtually unrepresented.<sup>41</sup>

The critics of pluralism hold that the pluralists are at least complacent about the apathy and political ignorance of the masses and that this tends to become a defense of existing elitism and more than a suggestion that this is what is to be desired.<sup>42</sup> Elites have, in many cases, become remote oligarchies, and the mass membership is neither involved nor committed, thereby, to procedures for conflict resolution.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, pluralism also seems to promote the alienation of individuals. The critics argue that in pluralism, many, probably most, citizens participate so little in groups having any political influence that they are effectively debarred from the benefits of the group process. Consequently these citizens feel, and are, politically powerless. They tend to become alienated from politics.<sup>44</sup> This feeling is also come from the centralization of advanced political power.<sup>45</sup>

Mechanically, pluralism is likely to endorse political oppression in the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Kuper, *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup>Brian M. Bullivant, *The Pluralist Dilemma in Education: Six Case Studies*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981, p. 244.

<sup>41</sup>Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 69. Some observers claim that the states which declare and promote to be pluralistic is economically based on transnational corporations which control the economies of Third World countries, therefore those countries are less pluralistic. Nurit Kliot and Stanley Waterman, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup>Pennock, *op. cit.*, p. 514.

<sup>43</sup>Harrison, *loc. cit.*

<sup>44</sup>Pennock, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

<sup>45</sup>Smock states that in political pluralism, "the centralization of political power has so advanced that the citizen feels almost naked before the anonymous and distant government and craves some form of identity in which to clothe himself to impart meaning to his existence." Smock, *op. cit.*, p. 5.



hands of governments. Cythia Enloe considers plural states to be artificial collectivities often sustained by oppression rather than by worthwhile goals of political development.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, pluralism is a political system that encourages competition rather than cooperation, and privatism (self-interest or selfishness of individuals) rather than community spirit and public selves.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Influence of Political Pluralism**

Besides its critics, pluralism has a powerful influence in the world of nation-states. The concept of pluralism, in political sense, begins to be worldly accepted in 1960s,<sup>48</sup> especially in the Western world. From now on country after country, both industrialized and developing, come into the need of the politicization of pluralism.<sup>49</sup> It is because of the differences of religious, ethnic, linguistic, regional, and racial differences have become more salient reference points in the political process.<sup>50</sup>

There is also adjustment to the pluralism in Muslim countries recently. It is due to the fact that "democracy and the political culture of pluralism, human rights, and liberal tolerance are basic products of cultural modernity."<sup>51</sup> The concept of pluralism, among other products of cultural modernity, is seen as a challenge to Muslim countries, "their adoption posited as a sign of having successfully joined the ranks of civilized nations."<sup>52</sup>

In Arabic speaking countries, pluralism has been indigenized into the term *ta'addud* since 1980s and has become one of the buzzwords of the 1990s.<sup>53</sup> So also in other languages such as Indonesian (*kemajemukan*) and Malay (*majmuk*) the term has been indigenized. In Muslim

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<sup>46</sup>As quoted by Smock, *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>Pennock, *op. cit.*, p. 514.

<sup>48</sup>The concept of pluralism itself is 90 years old and was defined only following the definition of monism (i.e. absolutism) and in opposition to it in view of the multifarious nature of reality. Pluralism is often used as a synonym for diversity and is frequently used in ethnic studies. In political sense, however, it refers directly to authority of power. Nurit Kliot and Stanley Waterman, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup>David R. Smock and Audrey C. Smock, *The Politics of Pluralism, A Comparative Study of Lebanon and Ghana*, New York/Oxford/Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1998, p. 24.

<sup>52</sup>Yvonne Y. Haddad, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

countries the response of pluralism is varied. Some of them see it as "antithetical to" Islam, some of them see it as "compatible with" Islam, and the rest see it as "the very essence of Islam."<sup>54</sup>

Having its success in political life, pluralism, then, is a mode of thought. The term disseminates in every single societal life: in the world of economy, in the philosophical area, in the field of theology, etc.

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.